



U.S. Department of Justice

***United States Attorney
Eastern District of Arkansas***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 2, 2006

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**LOUISIANA MAN INDICTED ON HURRICANE
KATRINA FRAUD CHARGES**

Little Rock -- United States Attorney Bud Cummins announced that a federal grand jury in the Eastern District of Arkansas returned a seventeen-count indictment today against EARNEST AVIST on Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) fraud charges.

AVIST, age 28, of Empire, Louisiana, was charged with fifteen counts of wire fraud and two counts of mail fraud. The indictment alleges that AVIST, while entitled to lodging for himself, rented seventeen hotel rooms and sublet them to other individuals. The indictment alleges that AVIST caused seventeen false claims to be submitted to FEMA for benefits for lodging in Conway, Arkansas and Little Rock, Arkansas.

The charges resulted from an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The wire frauds counts each carry a maximum term of imprisonment of thirty years and a \$1 million fine. The two mail fraud counts each carry a maximum term of imprisonment of thirty years and a \$1 million fine.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

For further information, contact Bud Cummins, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, or Jane Duke, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (501) 340-2600.

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